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ABSTRACT

A growing number of Americans believe that the public schools have a responsibility to include moral education in their curriculum; and, in fact, 31 states are currently offering courses aimed at teaching students some aspect of traditional values in the expectation of producing concerned citizens who will preserve our democarcy. Each moral education program, if it is to be successful, must reflect the values and characteristics of the surrounding community. Among the many components of most moral education programs today are: (1) a policy statement outlining the program's educational philosophy and instructional goals; (2) an understanding that school personnel will be seen as role models for students; (3) a heavy involvement of parents and the community; (4) a study of the Constitution; (5) an emphasis on academic excellence; and (6) opportunities to practice real-life moral behavior. Some special activities that schools with moral development programs have found useful include suggestion boxes, student/teacher/parent performance contracts, and heavily promoted volunteer programs. By all signs, moral education represents the wave of the future and of the present; perhaps public schooling in America is about to include the fourth R: Responsibilty. (KM)

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by Jeanne Heller

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Imagine what a kinder, gentler nation ours would be if everyone exhibited the old-fashioned virtues, the traits we expect in our best friends—and in our children. Things like honesty, sincerity, truthfulness, fairness, integrity, compassion, and the like.

Our national heroes wouldn't skirt the rules or be so obsessed with winning that they dismissed the idea of honesty and fair play as being childish. Our leaders would be frank and open. Neither students nor stock market executives nor defense contractors would cheat. The focus would be on helping people, not using them. People would have a sense of respect for *all* their fellow citizens. And they would be honest and forthright and fair.

If these kinds of things can be taught, Americans everywhere seem anxious for the schools to get busy teaching them. They want kids to learn right from wrong. They want the curriculum to include what has variously been called "moral education," "character development," "values education," "ethics training," and so forth.

Whatever the terminology, polls indicate that a growing number of Americans think that the public schools have a responsibility to teach it. And in fact, in at least 31 states today—from Texas to New York and from California to the District of Columbia—the schools are offering courses aimed at teaching students at least some aspects of these old-fashioned values, in the expectation of helping to produce concerned citizens who will preserve our democracy.

Advocates of moral education say the early results are encouraging. The students are responding favorably, they say, and principals and teachers seem to be successfully picking their way through a potentially controversial thicket: How to transmit the society's basic values without straying into religious or political indoctrination, and without encroaching on the territory of parents.

The moral vulnerability of children today is spelled out in the statistics on an array of social cancers ranging from drug abuse, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and venereal disease to dropout rates, family violence, and juvenile deaths from motor accidents, suicide, and homicide.

The challenge involved is monumental. Today's young people, some observers declare, are in danger of becoming morally handicapped adults at a time when it is imperative that they be morally as well as academically prepared to meet the formidable social and environmental challenges that await them. It is crucial that they be morally literate—possessed of a strong sense of right and wrong, a broad understanding of our culture's values, a foundation for making responsible decisions in the face of moral conflicts, and in general a firm grasp of the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship. A morally illiterate society would be hard-pressed to cope with such crucial challenges as an overcrowded planet, the "greenhouse effect," hunger and homelessness, the AIDS pandemic, worldwide pollution, and the array of other global issues—not to speak of the host of such more localized issues as abortion, surrogate parenthood, test-tube pregnancy, genetic engineering, creationism, euthanasia, gay rights, sex education, the drug crisis, and so forth.

Increasingly during the 1980s, various observers have wondered why we have failed to pass along the "old-fashioned," tried-and-true values to the new generation. Social scientists suggest a number of contributing factors, ranging from the evolution from an agrarian society into an industrialized society and changes in the family structure, to such mass psychological upheavals as the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War.

There is also the confusion at-

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tendant on evolving standards. Not long ago it was socially disgraceful to be in debt. Today credit card debts are a way of life for some people. Telling "right" from "wrong" has become more difficult. To say that certain couples are "living in sin" no longer conveys a message, and the virtue of thrift has been replaced by a throwaway mentality that leaves our landfills overflowing while garbage-laden barges cast about for dumping grounds.

One of the most telling reasons why "morality" is such a confusing proposition among young people today is the deterioration of moral values among so many of their elders. Consider such events as the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals, the drug-abuse problems of leading athletes, the widespread cheating and manipulation that now seem characteristic of leading figures on Wall Street, the succession of political leaders given to adultery and worse, the officials of the federal government who contrive to get their hands on money intended to benefit the poor, the defense contractors who skillfully cheat the government—these matters and the values inherent in them do not go unnoticed by kids in school. Indeed, a young person today might well conclude that unethical and even immoral behavior is "normal" among our most prominent and influential citizens and thus normal for all other citizens.

Actually, of course, honesty and fairness and all the other old-fashioned, time-tested virtues necessarily remain basic. They remain basic not simply as a matter of morality but because without them we would be beset by chaos. No one could trust anyone, trade and commerce would grind to a halt, our elected leaders could not govern, and daily living would become riven with strife and contention. Thus our individual happiness and the nation's strength and prosperity would appear to be tied, in at least some degree, to how successful the schools can be in teaching children to be honest and concerned and trustworthy and the other qualities that traditionally have been regarded as the American ideal.

Programs aimed in that direction are now under way in virtually every part of the nation, and they vary as widely as the states themselves vary. In Alabama, for example, the Birmingham City Schools have launched an elementary school program called "Cabbages and Kings," a series of 16 short TV presentations dealing with the ethical heritage that Americans share. The 15-minute "telelessons" focus on such concepts as honesty, cooperation, communication, goal-setting, courage, respect for property, patriotism, responsibility, acceptance of differences, unselfishness, pride, imagination, sportsmanship, self-concept, law and order, respect for others, decision making, and the value of work. The goal is to help students develop informed, wholesome attitudes and a value system commensurate with being a responsible, contributing member of society.

Moral education programs are now under way just about everywhere.

In California, the State Board of Education in 1987 adopted a new framework for the history and social sciences curriculum that calls for greater stress on our nation's traditional values and seeks to help students "see the connection between ideas and behavior, between the values and ideals that people hold and the ethical consequences of those beliefs." The Board has urged school administrators to place greater emphasis on the role of religion in history and on the ethical issues that have helped shape our society. Teachers are encouraged to stress the principles of morality, truth, justice, and patriotism, and to strive to impart a true comprehension of the rights, duties, and dignity of American citizenship.

What has been hailed as one of the more progressive moral education programs is the Child Development Project (CDP) in three elementary schools in San Ramon, a community near San Francisco. CDP is based on the concept of "cooperative learning" and calls for having small groups of children work on common tasks, thereby inculcating cooperation, problem-solving skills, and the ability to see the points of view of others. As a part of promoting character development, it teaches the children that such values as caring, fairness, helpfulness, concern for others, and individual responsibility are widely and deeply shared within the culture—they are considered the norm. CDP provides students with values-related experiences by involving them in making decisions that affect their school experience—for example, establishing rules of conduct. Ongoing evaluation indicates that when compared to the students in three schools that are not participating in the project, the CDP children are more spontaneous about helping one another and are more cooperative in the classroom, they play together more constructively on the playground, and in general they cope more easily with social problems without adversely affecting their academic achievement. (For more information, write CDP, 111 Deerwood Place, Suite 165, San Ra-

mon, California 94583, or call 415/838-7270.)

Across the country in Washington, D.C., a District of Columbia Commission on Values-Centered Goals completed a year-long study last June of how to teach values and submitted a plan to the school board for adoption. Its recommendations included proposals that all teachers be required to take a course in values instruction, that all school personnel be required to participate in values education seminars, that student "self-esteem clubs" be maintained, and that community service be required of all junior and senior high school students. It further suggested that students in all schools be asked to wear school uniforms. (A report on the 36 elementary schools and two junior high schools where uniforms already are being worn on a voluntary basis said the policy had won high praise from the schools' PTAs and credited the policy for a reduced incidence of fights and thefts, increased attendance, and higher test scores. In a Washington *Post* article arising from the report, one ninth grader was quoted as saying, "When I was dressing just like a street girl, I'd even skip classes just to show off [my clothes]. With the uniforms, it seems like I grew up.")

As for the community service requirement, the proposal notes that such a program offers many students perhaps their first experience of feeling that they count for something in the community. Said a member of the D.C. School Board, "This is the best kind of civics course I can think of. It helps our young people feel like they're part of society." The Atlanta and Detroit school systems also have adopted community service requirements, and education officials in California and Maryland are encouraging schools to give academic credit for community service.

In the Chicago area, all public and private elementary and secondary schools are invited to participate in a recognition program called "For Character," sponsored by the University of Illinois. The program salutes schools judged to be doing exemplary jobs of inculcating good character while stimulating academic learning. (Thus students get the message that character development and academic learning are mutually supportive goals.) Group recognition is considered an effective way to encourage group members to help one another; when only individuals are recognized, program officials note, there are fewer incentives for pupils to display empathy, teamwork, or loyalty. An important focus is on the development of school spirit, a loyal commitment to the school and everyone involved in it. Since the program's inception in 1984, about 25 elementary and middle schools have competed, and prizewinners have included schools from affluent suburbs and depressed areas alike. ("For Character" is described in detail in "Character Development: Renewing an Old Commitment," by Edward Wynne in the January 1986 issue of *Principal*.)

In Baltimore the values program focuses on 24 "core" American values.

In Maryland, when officials of the Baltimore County School District set out in 1982 to create a values-oriented curriculum, they began by inviting parents, community leaders, educators from both private and public schools, students, and religious leaders to identify what they felt to be the necessary tenets of a pluralistic society. Taking off from the United States Constitution, the group drew up a list of 24 "core values," ranging from compassion, courtesy, freedom of thought and action, and honesty to human worth and dignity, respect for other's rights, responsible citizenship, rule of law, and tolerance. The group sought to relate these values to everyday experiences; for instance, examples of "honesty" might include returning found valuables or money, not cheating on tests, and not forging a parent's signature. The program was ultimately implemented in all of Baltimore's 147 schools, and officials say it has led to an improved climate for learning in the schools and a marked increase in school pride.

In Massachusetts a few years ago the staff at Birch Meadow Elementary School found the students to be dismayingly callous, cliquish, uncaring toward one another, consumed with bickering, and given to scrawling graffiti on rest room walls. So they developed what they call their "Just Community" project, basing it on Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental theory of moral education. Describing the project in the February 1988 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*, former Birch Meadow Principal Dennis F. Murphy said, "As they work and plan with peers to reach goals and solve problems, our students . . . discuss differences of opinion and seek civilized ways of settling them. They share their emotions, and in the process they discover that they are not so different from their peers after all." Murphy noted that the program is based on two key elements: "circle meetings" in all classrooms, and student councils (one each for primary grades and intermediate grades) that meet regularly with the principal.

In Texas, the American Institute for Character Education (AICE), a 24-

year-old nonprofit foundation in San Antonio, estimates that since 1980 its Character Education Curriculum has been implemented in more than 25,000 classrooms in the cities of 44 states—including Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, Oklahoma City, and Houston. The K-9 program provides instructional materials for each grade level, including a teacher's guide, posters, activity sheets for individual and group activities, and evaluation instruments. Six hours of inservice training are recommended for teachers. The lessons focus on such values as honesty, truthfulness, kindness, generosity, helpfulness, courage, justice, tolerance, honor, freedom of choice and speech, individual rights, and the right to equal opportunity and economic security. Evaluations by teachers and principals are said to indicate significant improvement in student behavior in the classroom and lunchroom and on the playground, an increase in school attendance, and a decrease in vandalism. A review of the program was carried in the January 1986 issue of *Principal*. More information may be obtained by writing to AICE at 8918 Tesoro Drive #220, San Antonio, Texas 78717, or calling 512/829-1727 and (in continental USA) 1-800-284-0499.

Information about many more moral education programs and activities may be found in "Building Character in the Public Schools: Strategies for Success," the 1987 Leadership Report of the National School Boards Association. (Inquiries may be addressed to NSBA at 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314, telephone 703/838-6722.)

If it is to be successful, the experts say, a school's moral education program must reflect the values and characteristics of its community. That is why many schools seeking to establish such a program ask representatives of the community to take a leading role in designing it. That is also why such programs tend to be so diverse. Communities have varying standards; some may regard values as never-changing, while others perceive them as *ever*-changing.

Moreover, there are numerous ways of structuring these programs. The foundation for some is the development of personal, individual character and public citizenship, taught separately or together. Others take a community approach, with the school, parents, students, colleges and universities, churches, business, the media, community organizations, law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary system all working together. There's also the total school environment plan, where moral education is related not only to student learning and activities throughout the school day but to after-school activities at home and in the community. Some programs focus on a school-family partnership: Families may be asked to collaborate with the school in carrying out the program, or the school may serve as a consultant to families by providing parent training in pursuing mutual goals. Programs may be integrated into the curriculum or presented as separate special units.

Moral education programs take many forms and a variety of approaches.

Most moral education programs will include one or more of such components as the following:

- A policy statement outlining the program's educational philosophy and instructional goals, plus a code of ethics for students, teachers, and administrators; rules of student conduct, with consequences for violations; a code of sportsmanship; and a handbook of student rights
- An understanding that staff and school support personnel will be seen as role models for students
- A heavy involvement of parents
- Extensive community involvement, perhaps including community service projects
- A study of the Constitution and crucial court decisions bearing on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, featured in grade meetings, assemblies, and student council sessions
- Activities to build class and school spirit, including volunteer service on school projects
- Programs and activities aimed at developing self-esteem
- Student activities in the school and in the community that promote wider friendships
- A study of religions and religious principles
- An emphasis on academic excellence
- Family-life and sex education
- A program of competitive events for individuals and groups that emphasizes cooperation as well as competition and involves awards and other recognition
- A human relations program that among other things explores equal opportunity and the elimination of discrimination and promotes student/staff rapport and mutual respect
- A drug education program
- An exploration of Constitutional, personal, and public values
- Counseling, health services, and other forms of student assistance
- Mentorships
- Opportunities to practice real-life moral behavior
- Appropriate moral education

training for teachers
- Periodic evaluation.

And here is a small sampling of some special activities that schools with moral education programs have found useful:

- The establishment of a "fairness committee" composed of equal numbers of students and staff to mediate student complaints, disputes, and differences of opinion
- Suggestion boxes
- Student/teacher/parent performance contracts
- Heavily promoted volunteer programs in which students take responsibility for elements of the school's upkeep and operation. Assignments range from keeping classrooms neat and assisting in the library to serving as hall monitors or school crossing guards and being "buddies" to new students or younger students on field trips.
- An organized program, managed by a student/teacher/parent committee, for student participation in such events as food/clothing/toy drives, the county fair, ethnic festivals, recycling drives, first aid and fire prevention classes, Arbor Day tree plantings, litter pickup projects, and choral concerts for senior citizens
- An ambitious venture that requires extensive teacher training and staff development projects is the Law in a Free Society Program created by the State Bar of California and administered by the Center for Civic Education, an independent, nonprofit corporation. The K-12 curriculum focuses on eight basic concepts: authority, justice, responsibility, privacy, participation, freedom, diversity, and property. It posits that constitutional democracy depends on enlightened and responsible citizens, and that citizenship education should equip students with analytical and evaluative tools rather than just facts. Toward that end it seeks to develop conceptual thinking skills through an examination of crucial sociopolitical and legal problems. (More information may be obtained by writing to LFS, Center for Civic Education, 5146 Douglas Fir Road, Calabasas, California 91302, or calling 818/340-9320.)

And then there's a widely heralded program that NAESP has a hand in—the Close Up Foundation's Civic Achievement Award Program for grades five through eight. Funded by the U.S. government, the program was conceptualized by the Close Up Foundation in cooperation with NAESP, and both are involved in its operation. Students participating in the program receive a 160-page student resource book as backup (there's one for students in grades five/six, another for those in grades seven/eight), while they pursue the program's three basic components:

- A *Learning Project*, which engages the students in a study of American history, government, geography, economics, culture, and current events

For a considerable period in our nation's history—from Colonial days until well into the present century—"moral education" was *the* kind of education the schools offered. What students were expected to learn was set forth in the textbooks the teachers used, and one of the first of those textbooks was the Bible.

Then Spellers became popular, and soon Readers and Geographies and Penmanship texts. Each of them was designed to contribute to what was seen as the basic purpose of life and, thus, of education: to save one's soul. Spellers did not deal just in basic orthography but in basic morality. "In Adam's fall," the rhymed alphabet of *The New England Primer* began, doubtless to the utter bewilderment of the young scholars, "we sinned all."

Noah Webster, the most famous and prolific of the early textbook authors, noted that his blue-backed spelling text was intended not only "To improve the *mind*" but to "*refine* the *taste*" of his young readers, clearly a desirable goal. Webster and the other 19th century textbook writers portrayed an America in which hard work and virtuous conduct inevitably led to success and happiness, and their works were heavily larded with prayers, psalms, and exhortations.

The most famous textbook writer after Noah Webster was William McGuffey (1800–1873) whose six readers sold no less than 120 million copies and were the basic learning tool, it is said, for a billion young Americans. What these youngsters found were selections from great literature plus Bible stories; tales stressing patriotism, integrity, honesty, industry, temperance, courage, and politeness; and uplifting little tidbits.

McGuffey's readers have been reprinted on several occasions, and every once in a while a school board seeks to improve students' behavior by reintroducing them into the curriculum. Here is a reasonably representative example of what the students encounter:

Beautiful faces are they that wear
The light of pleasant spirit there;
Beautiful hands are they that do
Deeds that are noble, good, and true;
Beautiful feet are they that go
Swiftly to lighten another's woe.

• A *Research Project*, which take students into the community and the

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library, where they learn how to find and process information and communicate it to others

• A *Civic Project*, which echoes the Research Project by having students conduct research on a civic issue of their own choosing.

Following the program's authorization by the Congress in 1987, it was field-tested in 150 classrooms in 17 states. The overwhelmingly favorable reaction was typified by a principal who said, "Not only have these students learned valuable skills, including research, but they have also learned how to apply these skills as citizens of our country."

Today the program is fully operative, and principals interested in having their schools participate should contact the Close Up Foundation at 1235 Jefferson Davis Highway, Arlington, Virginia 22202, telephone 703/892-5400.

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By all signs, moral education (or "values education" or whatever) represents the wave of the future and of the present as well. Parent and community demand for it is here now, and from every indication the demand is going to grow. Perhaps the "me first," "if-it-feels-good-do-it" era has about run its course. Perhaps public schooling in America is about to include the fourth R—Responsibility.

For Further Reading

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